## Retrospective

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I asked Jim Bailey and Faith Wigzell to write about their involvement with SEEFA, the Slavic and East European Folklore Association, and with its journal, now called *Folklorica*, because this is my last year as the journal's editor. As I pass the journal on, it seems fitting to take a look back.

My own involvement with folklore probably dates back to my childhood. Much of it had to do with listening to my mother and my grandfather tell me stories. Some of their stories were traditional and some were personal narratives. Many were combinations of the two genres, modifications of traditional folk narratives adapted to suit the situation at hand. Listening to these stories was pure pleasure. I enjoyed the artistic renderings of my two storytellers and it should be noted that they were not related to each other; they did not form a familial line of narrators. My grandfather was my father's dad and obviously no relation to my mother.

The more intellectual push toward folklore also dates from my childhood. I was not born in North America. My family left Ukraine in 1936 and headed west. I was an accident that happened in a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany ten years later. We came to the United States in July 1951 and the following fall I entered school. It did not take me long to figure out that what I was being taught in the classroom was insufficient knowledge. To really understand American culture, to be able to fit in and function, I needed the information taught to me on the playground through jump rope rhymes, clapping games, taunts and jeers, crafts, and unorganized play that ranged from ball-bouncing games and Hide-and-Seek to Cowboys and Indians.

Learning from folklore, as well as in the classroom, I came to understand how to function in society and, when I completed my New Jersey public school education, I went on to university, first at Cornell and then at Radcliffe, majoring first in mathematics and then in Russian literature. I entered graduate school and it was here that folklore again presented itself in the form of Albert Bates Lord, father of the oral theory. Folklore was wonderful. Folklore was fun. Folklore allowed me to explore a question that had come to dominate my thinking, namely why art is necessary to human existence. And folklore allowed me to work with something that had been important to me all my life. Folklore

also allowed me to work on another aspect of my adjustment to the West. While I did function well in American society, I did not myself feel that I was well-adjusted. I was having what would later be called an identity crisis, questioning whether I was an American, a Russian, or, as many of my Ukrainian friends told me, a Ukrainian. So, at the urging of Lord, I decided to do something completely different and chose Turkey as the place where I would do my fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation. The Turks were the hereditary enemies of the Slavs. If I could be accepted by the Turks, I felt, I would stop having doubts about my integration into American society. There were also practical reasons for choosing Turkey, of course. In both Ukrainian and Russian epic poetry, the dumy and the byliny, the enemy is the Tatar and the Turk. If I was going to work on Slavic epic song, then looking at it from the other side, from that of the enemy, would be a wonderful contribution to scholarship. And, if I wanted to do fieldwork, then I had to choose a place other than Russia or Ukraine. Fieldwork there was out of the question since, at that time, both were part of the Soviet Union. There was little to no chance of looking at archival materials, let alone wandering about the countryside looking for whatever performers of epic might remain.

I did learn Turkish. I did write a dissertation on Turkish minstrel tales, a hybrid of song and prose which tells about military conflicts, like epic, but also features romantic plots, stories of star-crossed lovers, unable to realize their love because their families come from different religious backgrounds. I came to love Turkey, a love that has endured even as I returned to work in the Slavic area. My attraction to things Turkic was most recently realized in a month-long trip to Kazakhstan. What also happened as a result of my dissertation work was that I made a very important discovery about art. Lord and I had assumed that the Turks would sing about their conflicts with the Russians and Ukrainians, just as the Slavs sang about fighting the Turks. We postulated that the Turks would boast about their victories in battle just as the Slavs praised the heroism of their combatants, valiant men who kept on fighting in defence of a hopeless cause. But this proved not to be the case. The enemy in Turkish minstrel tales was Iran and the Slavs did not figure in Turkish heroic narrative. What I learned from my comparative work is that one does not sing about the conflicts in which one is victorious. Art is most needed where there is pain and sorrow, the imperative to deal with loss. Thus the Turks did not sing about battles won, but about conflicts lost, as did the Ukrainians and Russians.

After graduate school, in fact before I had completed my dissertation, I was hired by the University of Virginia where I taught for thirty years. When I was being interviewed for the position, I said that I would teach any set of courses that the department wanted me to teach – as long as one of them was a folklore course. My request was granted and my folklore course was popular and grew. It grew in enrolment, and with University pressure to teach many students, my colleagues were persuaded to let my folklore courses grow in number as well until I was teaching something close to a full set of courses: one each on folk prose, folk verse, family ritual, and calendar rituals and holidays. Toward the end of my career at Virginia I was also teaching magic and folk medicine. I had the good fortune to work with many graduate students. Their questions and their research taught me a great deal. Their interests shaped mine. I would probably not have spent as much time researching ritual had it not been for my students. There were also a number of gifted undergraduates and undergraduates whose struggles shaped my work. I learned from the gifted ones much in the way that I learned from the graduate students. As for the students struggling with dyslexia or juggling the demands of university athletics and their attempts to get a real education – helping them and coming up with strategies that would maximize their learning taught me a great deal.

It was also while I was at the University of Virginia that SEEFA came into being. There had been a number of attempts at starting a professional organization devoted to Slavic folklore prior to the creation of SEEFA. There were various folklore sections of Slavic and East European organizations such as AATSEEL, the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages. There were Slavic sections of the American Folklore Society. None functioned longer than a few years until James Bailey started SEEFA. His story of how he began this organization appears in the report written by him. Here I will give my own feelings on the need for an organization of this type. From the point of view of scholars in the West, what we needed was an advocacy group. There has always been a tendency to trivialize folklore, to assume that, because we all produce and consume folklore appropriate to our own folk group, there is nothing to study. If one wants to examine the folkloric stratum in literature, for example, one can do so with no training in folklore, or so it was assumed. We who are folklorists needed to show the world that ours was a serious discipline, with rigorous standards. This would help our own careers and those of our students.

There was another reason why SEEFA seemed so very important at the time that it was conceived. The Soviet Union had fallen apart and we were now travelling to countries that had formerly been part of the Soviet Bloc. I was able to get relatively free access to archives even before Ukrainian independence, namely in the period of Perestroika (Perebudova in Ukrainian). With the collapse of the Soviet Union the prospect of not only archival work but actual fieldwork in villages became real. As we travelled and interacted with our post-Soviet colleagues more and more, as scholars from the former Soviet Union came to professional meetings in the West, it became clear that folklore scholarship in the two parts of the world had grown apart. Old folklore scholarship, the work done in Russia and Ukraine and throughout East Europe had followed trends in the rest of Europe and North America: the same sort of data was collected, the same questions were asked. The existence of a common approach to folklore ended with the Stalin era. The Iron Curtain prevented contact between East and West and scholars in the two parts of the world developed independently and grew apart. During the Soviet period, folklore followed the dictates of Soviet ideology and there was only one possible interpretative approach. This made theory uninteresting. At the same time, folklore forms which might reveal religiosity on the part of the population, or nationalist feelings were taboo and collecting them was risky at best. As a result, when the Soviet Union collapsed, in almost all of the nation states that emerged from it, the interest was in collecting data, especially those folklore forms that could not be collected in the past. Meanwhile in the West, partially to prove their standing as serious scholars, folklorists became heavily involved in theory, often to the detriment of any data collection. It became clear to me that the folklorists of the former Soviet Union had much to teach folklorists in the West just as folklorists in the West had much to offer their post-Soviet colleagues. SEEFA and its journal emerged as the perfect vehicle for that exchange of knowledge. This was where scholars from the West could showcase their theoretical interpretations of folklore while post-Soviet folklorists could share the data that they were collecting, data of the type that had not been collected for years. They could also offer their interpretations of their lore. There was one problem: the language barrier. Early in the life of SEEFA its executive board decided that, in order to make the information presented available to the greatest number of people, in order to avoid any nationalist tensions that might exist between post-Soviet states, any publications produced by the organization would be in English. While

writing in English might not be difficult for scholars in the West, it was a challenge for many who had grown up in the Soviet world. Most submissions coming from Russia and other post-Soviet states needed to be rewritten.

The early SEEFA journal did not pose that many difficulties when it came to rewriting submissions written by scholars who were not native speakers of English. The early journal was essentially a newsletter with information on folklore courses, on conferences and folklore panels scheduled for them, on expeditions and other fieldwork opportunities. As the newsletter grew, articles were added to notices and the publication started to become a journal. Many people worked on the journal, fixing the English, soliciting submissions. I was one of them and I was fortunate to have the help of my husband, Peter Holloway, who quite early took on the task of formatting the publication for printing. The publication acquired the title of *SEEFA, The Journal of the Slavic and East European Folklore Association*, and later *Folklorica*, the title that it carries now. My role in the organization varied over the years. I served as president. I believe I held other offices as well. I tended to help out as needed and the journal was one item that required regular help. Every-so-often the journal would appear to be on the verge of collapse. I would step in to save it, often with the assistance of others.

The big change in the journal came with the editorship of Faith Wigzell, another person who kindly agreed to my request to contribute a personal retrospective to this issue. Wigzell made *Folklorica* into the serious publication that we all wanted it to be. She insisted on double peer review of all submissions. She made sure that the English of all articles was polished. The organization still had its struggles with presidents and other officers who served in name only. But the journal was in good shape. It came out regularly and the articles were of high quality. It was during Wigzell's editorship that I was recruited by and moved to the University of Alberta where I was offered a chaired professorship with a nice endowment. The University permitted me to put part of the endowment toward subsidizing *Folklorica*. With the monies that went toward publishing and mailing costs, we were able to go to the format which the journal has now.

When Wigzell decided to retire, a new editor was selected at the SEEFA annual general meeting. Unfortunately the editor proved to be one of those officers who accepted the title but not the responsibilities of the office. Because Holloway and I were still putting the journal together, printing it, and mailing it out, and probably for other reasons,

specifically my deep commitment to folklore in general and to SEEFA in particular, and also my lifelong tendency to help out as needed, I took over the editorship when I learned that the official editor had done nothing and publication time was fast approaching. I have now served as editor for five years.

Editing *Folklorica* is a big job. It is a more difficult job than editing a normal journal precisely because virtually all submissions from the former Soviet Union and East Europe need to be rewritten to get them into comprehensible English. Rewriting some 200 pages every year is a lot of work. I have been assisted in this task in many ways and by many people. Wigzell and a number of SEEFA members have taken on the task of "Englishing" some of the submissions, saving me much rewriting work. I try to thank them in the editor's statement at the beginning of each issue. The University of Alberta has helped. For the last three years I have had course release time. I teach one course less per year than a normal course load so that I can devote myself to *Folklorica*. The University has also paid for Hanna Chuchvaha. She is officially my research assistant, supported by the department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, but you know her as the capable person who handles submissions and other correspondence. She was preceded in this position by Svitlana Kukharenko, a research assistant supported by the Kuryliw graduate student fund in the Kule Folklore Centre. Both Chuchvaha and Kukharenko also provided translations of some submissions that were in languages other than English. I have already thanked the Kule Endowment for subsidizing printing and mailing. The endowment also pays Katherine Bily who does the copy editing.

One person who deserves special thanks is Peter Holloway. He has already been thanked by Bailey and Wigzell for formatting the journal and getting it to the printer and then to the post office. But I need to expand on those thanks by listing all of the unseen things that Holloway contributes. After I am done editing all of the submissions, he reads the entire journal, often catching mistakes that I missed. He has registered the journal with the Library of Congress and we now have an International Standard Serial Number, ISSN. Holloway has done a tremendous job recruiting new members to the organization. His enthusiasm for folklore has just about doubled our readership. And Holloway does this without getting paid. He feels as strongly as I do that *Folklorica* serves a vital mission by providing a communication link between East and West. He does what he does for the good of folklore and for the sake of scholarship. For many years Holloway was also the

SEEFA webmaster. He would put the journal on the internet so that it could be accessed around the world. And, indeed, in recent years almost every book I review that deals with the Slavic and East European world cites at least one article from our journal.

Holloway's job as webmaster was recently assumed by Jon Perkins. Perkins ran the SEEFA Newsletter early in the society's history. He recently volunteered to take on the web version of *Folklorica* and has done a beautiful job. The website is professional-looking and easy to use. Access to the journal functions much like that of other major journals: the most recent three years are password-protected and accessible to members only; all other issues are free and open to the public. The on-line access to *Folkorica* is part of the Kansas University's Serials Service.

All in all, the journal has achieved the level of professionalism that all of us strove for all along. This was recently brought home to me when I attended the Second All-Russia Folklore Congress in Moscow where *Folklorica* was scheduled for a special presentation session that featured recent publications in the field. The session was very well attended and interest in the journal was high. I was perhaps even more impressed by the fact that, when I was sitting in one of the Moscow State University offices, waiting for transportation to Ershovo, the location of the Folklore Congress, one of the local scholars, upon learning that I was the *Folklorica* editor, jumped up and shook my hand and congratulated me on the service that our journal performs. This gesture validated my desire to have *Folklorica* serve as a bridge between East and West, a link that would make Western scholarship accessible in the former Soviet Union and give scholars from the former Soviet Union and East Europe a means for showcasing their work worldwide. It made me feel that I had accomplished my goal and that *Folklorica* has achieved the status and the level of recognition to which we all aspired.

I have not mentioned the many officers of SEEFA because this retrospective is dedicated specifically to the journal *Folklorica*. Needless to say, most of them have not been problematic and have done their best to serve the organization and their colleagues. Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby who has served as SEEFA Secretary-Treasurer will be assuming the editorship of *Folklorica* after me. I trust that, under her leadership, the journal will continue to flourish and grow.